



ACCESS CURRENTS

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Refresh of Section 508 Standards Tops Board Rulemaking Plan

The Access Board plans to initiate steps this summer to review and update its access standards for electronic and information technology covered by section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act. These standards cover products and technologies procured by the Federal government, including computer hardware and software, websites, phone systems, fax machines, and copiers, among others. The constantly changing nature of the technologies covered necessitates periodic reviews of these standards. This effort, which will be the first update of the standards since their publication in late 2000, will address new or convergent types of technologies and other areas where the standards need to be revisited. The Board considers it important that this work be coordinated on an international scale.



Representatives from the Board and various Federal agencies meet their counterparts from the European Commission in Washington, D.C. to lay the groundwork for greater coordination and harmonization.

As part of this effort, the Board also plans to update its guidelines for telecommunications products and equipment covered by the Telecommunications Act. Section 255 of this act ensures access to telecommunications products and services. Issued in 1998, the Telecommunications Act Accessibility Guidelines provide operating characteristics and product capabilities necessary for access. Provisions in the section 508 standards for telecommunication products are based on these guidelines. However, the Telecommunications Act guidelines are not limited to technologies procured by the Federal government and apply to products designed, developed and manufactured in the U.S.

The Board plans to organize an advisory committee to review its standards and guidelines and to recommend changes. In conducting this update, the Board will coordinate its work with international organizations, such as the European Union (EU), and other nations in order to advance global harmonization and standardization. As a first step in this effort, the Board and other Federal agencies met with EU representatives in February to exchange information on access standards for information technology. In addition, the Board will seek to further harmonize revisions with other standards and guidelines for the technologies covered, such as those issued by World Wide Web Consortium.

Additional rulemaking efforts under consideration by the Board include an update of the Board's accessibility guidelines for transportation vehicles and communication access. The Board's vehicle guidelines, which were issued under the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1991, cover various modes of transportation, including buses, vans, rail cars, and trams, among others. The Board plans to review these guidelines to determine whether any updates or revisions are necessary. The Board also will explore developing supplementary guidelines on communication access for various types of elements, including point of sales machines, interactive transaction machines, communication devices for drive-through services, public address systems, and certain types of alarms, such as carbon monoxide detectors, that are not currently addressed by the Board's guidelines.

Board Partners with Agencies to Provide Training on New Standards

New facility guidelines the Board issued in 2004 are serving to update design standards used to enforce the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and the Architectural Barriers Act (ABA). Several different agencies are involved in adopting new standards which apply to various classes of facilities. Last year, the U.S. Postal Service and the General Services Administration (GSA) adopted new standards under the ABA, which applies to federally funded facilities. The standards adopted by the Postal Service apply to post offices and other postal facilities, while the GSA standards apply to most other Federal buildings (except military and housing facilities). Standards for facilities covered by the ADA will be updated by the departments of Justice and Transportation.

To facilitate the implementation of the new standards, the Board is providing extensive training on the new specifications as contained in its updated guidelines. The Board offers a variety of programs on the new guidelines, including a day-long session that outlines changes from the previous standards. Training sessions are often tailored to the interests or focus of each audience. Training programs have been conducted in partnership with other agencies, including those that have issued new ABA standards. Last year, the Board trained Postal Service facilities personnel at eight regional locations across the country. The Board is currently preparing plans for similar training programs in partnership with the Federal Aviation Administration and GSA. For further information on training opportunities, contact the Board's training coordinator, Peggy Greenwell, at training@access-board.gov (e-mail), (202) 272-0017 (v) or (202) 272-0082 (TTY), or visit the Board's website at www.access-board.gov/training.htm.



DOT Proposes Amendments to its ADA Regulations

The U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT) issued a notice on February 27 to amend its ADA regulations. These regulations cover policies and practices by transit operators as well as detailed criteria for transportation facilities and vehicles. The notice seeks to clarify the responsibility of transportation providers to make reasonable modifications to their policies and practices to ensure program access. In addition, the notice addresses boarding platform access at commuter and intercity rail stations that would preserve requirements in the current standards for transportation facilities in light of DOT's plan to update its standards based on the new guidelines the Board has issued under the ADA. The notice is available for comment until April 28, 2006. The notice also seeks public feedback on other issues including bus rapid transit, classification of key stations, vintage streetcars, coverage of intercity rail, and other issues where clarification in the regulations is needed. Comments on this part of the notice are due by May 30, 2006. The notice and related docket information is available on DOT's website at <http://dms.dot.gov>.

Courthouse Access Advisory Committee Meets in D.C.

The Courthouse Access Advisory Committee held its first quarterly meeting of the year February 9th and 10th in Washington, D.C. Chartered by the Board in 2004 to promote accessibility in the design of courthouses, the committee is developing best practice recommendations and preparing outreach and training plans. Committee members include designers, disability groups, members of the judiciary, and court administrators, among others. At the meeting, the committee reviewed recommendations and plans developed to date and met with the leadership of the American Institute of Architects' Committee on Architecture for Justice. Also on the agenda was a presentation on access for people with multiple chemical sensitivities and electro-magnetic sensitivities. The Committee's next meeting is scheduled for May 18th and 19th in Miami at the Hyatt Regency. For further information, contact Dave Yanchulis at caac@access-board.gov (e-mail), (202) 272-0026 (v), or (202) 272-0082 (TTY).

New 508 Specialist and Deputy General Counsel Join Board Staff



Timothy Creagan joined the Access Board in January as a senior specialist in accessible information and telecommunication technology. In this position, he will provide technical assistance and training to the public on Board guidelines and standards, including standards for electronic and information technology issued under section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act and guidelines for telecommunication products covered by section 255 of the Telecommunications Act. In addition, he will oversee Board efforts to review, update, and supplement these design criteria. Before joining the Board, Creagan served as Director of Consumer Training at the Information Technology Technical Assistance and Training Center (ITTATC), which promotes the development and use of accessible telecommunications and electronic and information technology. Previously, he was Director of Public Policy at the Hearing Loss Association of America. Creagan succeeds Doug Wakefield, who retired from government service last June.



Lisa Fairhall joined the Board in February as its new Deputy General Counsel. In this capacity, she will provide legal support to Board rulemaking efforts, including the development of new guidelines for public rights-of-way and the update of the section 508 standards for electronic and information technology. She will also oversee the Board's compliance and enforcement unit which investigates complaints filed under Architectural Barriers Act, a law that ensures access to federally funded facilities. Fairhall comes to the Board with over 20 years experience at the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). She served as Chief of OMB's Personnel Policy Branch and in previous positions coordinated policy on disability issues, civil rights, and education. During the drafting of the ADA, Fairhall played a lead role in coordinating the administration's position on the act. She also was active in implementing performance management initiatives. Before joining OMB, Fairhall was an attorney in private practice. She succeeds Elizabeth Stewart, an attorney with the Board for 20 years, who returned to the practice of family law in her home state of Florida.

Accessible Voting Systems Required in Federal Elections

The first of the year marked the deadline by which voting systems used in Federal elections must be accessible under the Help America Vote Act. The law requires every precinct in the country to have at least one voting machine or system accessible to persons with disabilities, including those with vision impairments, by January 1, 2006. Access is required so that persons with disabilities have the same opportunity for participation, including privacy and independence, afforded other voters. Passed in 2002, the act implements these and other reforms in response to the balloting controversies that arose in the 2000 presidential election. In addition to access for people with disabilities, these reforms include measures that will allow voters to verify and correct ballots before they are cast and will remove language barriers. The law also authorized funding to states to help cover the costs of compliance.

In December, the Election Assistance Commission, which was set up under the law to implement the reforms, issued new guidelines that states can follow on a voluntary basis to ensure that voting systems function accurately and reliably. The Voluntary Voting System Guidelines cover usability, including accessibility for people with disabilities, security, and privacy. "These guidelines were created to ensure that voting systems will be accurate, reliable, secure and accessible to all voters," noted Commission member Gracia Hillman after the Commission's vote to adopt the guidelines. The guidelines, which are responsive to advances in voter system technologies, provide performance criteria for functionality, accessibility and security that systems can be tested against. They also establish evaluation criteria for the certification of voting systems. They will replace standards issued by the Federal Election Commission in 2002. Currently, 39 states use these standards in certifying voting systems.

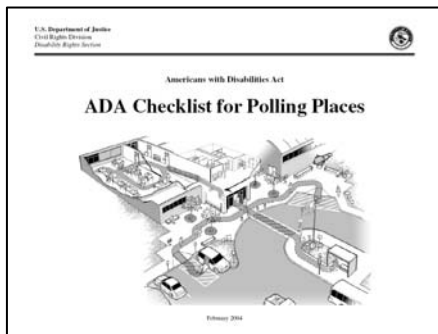
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The guidelines were prepared by an advisory body that included representation from the Board. Through their seats on this panel, Board members J.R. Harding, Ed.D. and James Elekes, M.Ed, MPA/CPM, provided input on voting system accessibility. The Commission released the guidelines for public comment last June and received over 6,000 comments during the 90-day comment period. In addition to its work on the guidelines, the Commission serves as a national resource for information on the administration of Federal elections, conducts studies on voting system improvements, and administers various grant programs funded by the law. The new guidelines and related information are posted on the Commission's website at www.eac.gov.

Polling Place Access Also Covered by the ADA

In addition to the Help America Vote Act, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) has requirements for accessibility that are pertinent to polling places. Under title II of the ADA, state and local governments must ensure access to their programs and services, including voting. The U.S. Department of Justice, which regulates and enforces this provision, has issued a guide on polling place accessibility. The *ADA Checklist for Polling Places* is designed to help local jurisdictions in selecting sites for polling places through an evaluation of architectural accessibility. It can be used to identify barriers to access and to determine how best to address them. Based on the ADA's design requirements for buildings and facilities, the checklist covers access to parking, passenger drop-off areas, sidewalks, and entrances so that all areas and elements used by voters are accessible. The checklist is posted on the DOJ's website at www.ada.gov/votingck.htm or can be ordered by calling (800) 514-0301 (voice) or (800) 514-0383.



Access Currents is a free newsletter issued by the Access Board every other month by mail and e-mail. Send questions or comments to news@access-board.gov or call (800) 872-2253 ext. 0026 (voice) or (800) 993-2822 (TTY). Mailing address: 1331 F Street, N.W., Suite 1000; Washington, D.C. 20004-1111.

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